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is of no nation, because He is of all nations, Whose revelation has "made of one blood all nations that dwell on the face of the earth," and Who has revealed to us all, not only the ideal, but has given His people power to press on to its attainment.

A national ideal is to me a moral ideal, and a moral ideal, if it is to be permanent, must be a religious ideal. No child can have too high a conception of his country's duty or destiny. And we have no higher joy than to see this moral, religious ideal dominating our youth and strengthening them to do the will of God.

"If I have been overbold in attempting this, I beg pardon."

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF GREAT BOOKS.

SHAKESPEARE (II.)

BY W. OSBORNE BRIGSTOCKE.

"*Vivere, mi Lucilli, militare est.*"

Seneca, Ep. xcvi. (quoted by Montaigne).

KEEPING in mind "the new terms of the problem which makes character the pivot of dramatic action and consequently the key of dramatic unity," we turn to the histories and, without any preconceived idea of seeing what we want to see, we must endeavour to understand to what extent and in what manner the action depends on self-control. And, before considering some of the plays in detail, it may be well to recall one fact that is of great importance in the study of history.

Frequently enough the course of events seems to depend on chance occurrences, changes are rung in by the succession of a monarch, by a king's untimely death, by the ambitions of a despot; and generally speaking it is true that individual acts gain value as historical facts when, and only when, so circumstanced as to have a widespread influence. When a boy throws stones into a pond, a big stone may by chance fall on the soft ground at the water's edge, and it makes no impression on the surface of the water; another smaller one may reach the water and the ripples pass from bank to bank. The difference in the distance may not have been more than a foot or so. The same striking value of "a few extra inches" is to be noticed in human life; in order to influence a people to any considerable extent, a man must fall in the right place, must not only possess the power to act, but must be so placed as to have full opportunity to use his power. To the assertion that Shakespeare chose the kings of English history for his treatment of the practical side of life, it may be objected that kings are not necessarily so placed as to be able to have an abiding and important influence

on a nation. This objection is, however, specious; for, taking mankind generally, no class of men has better opportunities to develop their powers than kings. And, by choosing the histories of English kings, Shakespeare merely simplified his theme. His song was of men, and in order to study and express his thoughts about mankind in the most convenient way, he chose the one man in the realm whose strength or feebleness of character was sure to influence to some considerable degree the existence of many other men. He could, in this way, show to what a depth a man may sink, how strong he may become either in sin or righteousness, how weak in either. Nor is this all. An eccentric individual, provided he be not a prominent figure in the world, can hardly make much difference; let poets, artists, actors, merchants, obey the transient dictates of loose fancy; they may indeed derive some profit from being peculiar; but a king must be a ruler, and a ruler has always human nature depending on his will; he has it both in himself and in the world he sways; he is not free to shift his environment, as is an independent man; he cannot even improve matters beyond a certain limit; he must, in fact, in order to succeed, take into account the "limits of the world of the practicable."

And, throughout the historical plays, which we shall find to be a study of mankind in this "limited world of the practicable," it is necessary to keep in mind the words: "There is some soul of goodness in things evil, would men observingly distil it out." With this conviction, no doubt, Shakespeare began his historical work, for it is an early stage of thought; if in childhood we are apt to see nought but goodness in all things, there is a tendency to see no good at all, when once the first discovery of wrong is made; but after a while the world that seemed so black grows lighter, the dazzled eye that could see nothing grows accustomed to the twilight and perceives, however faintly, some gleam of light in almost all things. But it is only when the vision is absolutely clear again, that the eye rests on certain points and finds them impenetrably black. "*The pity of it! The pity of it!*" before which we can only feel that there is something we do not understand, cannot fathom, except it be with the assistance of some Ariel we have won to ourselves.

In *Richard III.* we have an example of what is practicable in the way of sin. In the whole play there is no trace of failure, except at the very end; and even then we feel that Richard yields to odds over which no mere man could possibly triumph. He runs his life's course at a breathless pace, practicable, we may say, only because proved to be so, nevertheless abnormal and, as it were, sustained by an impetus natural life could not supply. From the very beginning we shudder at this horror—a most powerful will confined within a fiend's shape. To his mother he came not as a comfort, as he ironically suggests, but as the Duchess says:—

"A grievous burthen at his birth . .
Tetchy and wayward in his infancy . .
His schooldays frightful, desperate, wild and furious,
His age confirm'd, proud, subtle, sly and bloody,
More mild, but yet more harmful kind in hatred."

Add that Richard was bold, clever, self-possessed, even artistic (for from his language we may suppose him to have been a musician). At the outset we see this mine of dangerous possibilities "descanting on his own infirmities," determining to prove a villain since he cannot prove a lover. And yet the curtain has hardly been raised a second time when we find him indeed a lover, the lover of the Lady Ann, the successful wooer of a widow, and she the widow of the man he murdered. And yet this scene, terrible and startling as it is, sinks into insignificance when compared to such sublime blasphemy as:—

"A flourish, trumpets!—strike alarum, drums!
Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women
Raii on the Lord's anointed: strike I say."

This passage, quite apart from its position amongst Shakespeare's most brilliant touches, is of great importance in that it at once and definitely disposes of any lurking suspicion we may have had that Richard might not be the pitiless devil he claimed to be. Clearly enough these words are proof that all his crimes were, not sins of passion, hatred, malice, greed, but the expression of his very nature; that his having been able to gnaw a crust at two hours old was not a meaningless coincidence, but a significant fact. And nothing pays a larger tribute to Richard's supernatural genius for evil than the horror with which we hear the little son of Clarence say

in answer to the Duchess of York when she affirmed that he could not guess who caused his father's death—

"Grandame we can: for my good uncle Gloster
Told me, the King, provok'd to 't by the queen,
Devis'd impeachments to imprison him.
And when my uncle told me so, he wept,
And pitied me, and kindly kiss'd my cheek,
Bade me rely on him as on my father,
And he would love me dearly as a child."

Such misplaced confidence touches a mystery and we cannot but wonder why the branches still grow after the root is gone, and why the leaves that want their sap still keep their freshness. And when we consider Richard's personal appearance we read a new meaning into:—

"No more can you distinguish of a man
Than of his outward show; which, God he knows,
Seldom or never jumpeth with the heart."

And Richard is the man of whom Lord Hastings said:—

"I think there's ne'er a man in Christendom
Can lesser hide his love or hate than he;
For by his face straight shall you know his heart."

It is in this play, perhaps, more than in any other that Shakespeare lashes untruthfulness in life; there is an earnestness in the bitter irony which suggests that the play is coincident with a phase of feeling most of us must have felt at one time or another—the egotistical scepticism, the formal creed "I am I, let my way be freed from obstacles somehow, anyhow," in other words, *Beylism*. And although Shakespeare no doubt felt firmly convinced that Richard's self was truly self misused, nevertheless one cannot follow the headlong success of that career of bloodshed without feeling a little of the enthusiasm that is always kindled at the sight of any exceptional success. Nor can we feel quite unsympathetic when the untiring Richard leaves behind the wearied Buckingham who craves "some little breath, some pause." Whereat the King is vexed and gnaws his lip. "Tut, tut, thou art all ice; high-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect. The deep-revolving witty Buckingham no more shall be the neighbour to my counsels—

"Hath he so long held out with me untir'd
And stops he now for breath?—well, be it so."

And Richard flies on headlong, already so far in sin, that sin will pluck on sin; already so experienced as to have

"learn'd that fearful commenting
Is leaden servitor to dull delay;
Delay leads impotent and snail-pac'd beggary;
Then fiery expedition be my wing,
Jove's Mercury, and herald for a King!"

until at length he is overtaken by the only thing he could not outrun—despair. He realises he may die and that, in that case, no eye will weep for him, no soul feel pity for him. And despair answers: "Wherefore should they? since that I myself find in myself no pity to myself." But the venom of despair has, so to say, pervaded his hot blood and cooled his courage. Like Satan when he went "wrapt in mist of midnight vapour, gliding obscure, and prying into every bush and brake," so Richard went playing the eaves-dropper, under his own tents, to hear if any meant to shrink from him—

"what will not ambition and revenge
Descend to?"

And yet, though we feel that Shakespeare must have sympathised keenly with the prodigious and successful strength of will of his fiend-hero; even though we go to the length of saying that the whole play is the expression of a mood of bitterness against the world's weakness, a mood that gradually passed into the less fierce contempt of the sentimental Richard and of that past master in the art of shilly-shally, John, passed into sympathetic admiration for the heroic men of action, Hotspur, the Bastard, Henry V. and Bolingbroke; even, I say, if we go to the length of thinking that when Shakespeare allowed "one that had ever been God's enemy" to say with justice to the Queen, "relenting fool, and shallow changing woman!"—when he exalts him far above all the weak commonplace sinners that surround him, when he portrays him as a rebel against destiny, kicking against the pricks and fighting against his Creator, we must suppose that he was merely convincing himself that, however tempting may seem at times the doctrine that life is an ascent o'er fallen foes rather than a progress of self-sacrifice, however nearly a man like Richard III. may succeed in flouting the decrees of justice

and humanity, the fall is sure to come, the life even on which "sin, death and hell had set their marks" must wane, Richard must find that he was losing his alacrity of spirit and wonted cheer of mind, shadows might strike terror even into his soul, and though he might still have the strength to say:—

"Let not our babbling dreams fright our souls;
For conscience is a word that cowards use. . . .
March on, join bravely, let us to 't pell mell,
If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell,"

though he might "enact more wonders than a man," he must realise that he had set his life upon a cast and lost, that if he stood the hazard of the die, it was because he felt that all was lost. Somewhat vaguely, but, I think, unmistakably, we are given to understand that Richard's life paved the way to better things. Like Goethe's Mephistopheles he was a spirit that always tried to bring about some evil thing, though all the while some unseen hand was there to divert his aim.

In *King John* we still find Shakespeare laying bare with ruthless touch the despicable crimes and follies of a king, one now not strong with the strength of a fallen angel, but cowardly and mean. King John's question:—

"Think you I bear the shears of destiny?
Have I commandment on the pulse of life?"

reminds us of the bitterest irony in *Richard III*. But it is followed by the full revelation of John's weakness:—

"They burn in indignation. I repent.
There is no sure foundation set on blood;
No certain life achiev'd by other's death."

There is a lack of sincerity here which marks the difference between this play and the last. The Duke of Gloster meant what he said; he could hardly have stooped to John's vulgar baseness, not at any rate before he began to totter. John is of quite other stuff; he is possessed by the idea of "our strong possession and our right for us"; and yet in a short while we find him entertaining "that smooth-faced gentleman, tickling commodity; commodity, the bias of the world." Like Richard II. he has not the strength to arm himself against his giddy loose suggestions. And, as is only natural, by failing to make use of his faculty for arming himself, he loses

control of his limbs, so that when he finds himself in slippery places he

"Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up."

That is the difference between John and Richard III. The one has willed to do wrong for wrong's sake. The other is but a module of *confounded* royalty from whom his people turn in sheer disgust, even to

"Kiss the lips of unacquainted change."

Then when at length the storm breaks to clear the foul sky, all seems to promise, and more clearly than in Richard's case, a time of better things; and the Bastard exclaims: "Nought shall make us rue, if England to itself do rest but true," words which point forward to the second chorus in Act i. of *Henry V*.

It is noticeable that in *King Richard II*. Shakespeare lays great emphasis on the fact that that "unstaïd youth" is heaven's substitute—the deputy elected by the Lord. One cannot but contrast this with the very doubtful claim of Henry V. On his deathbed Henry IV. reminded his son "by what by-paths, and indirect crook'd ways he met the crown"; warned him that, although he stood more sure than his father could, he was not firm enough, since griefs were green. Clearly there is some radical reason for this difference—the failure of the Lord's substitute and the success of the usurper's son. It may not prove profitless to compare Richard II. with Henry V. so as to understand exactly where this difference lies. For clearly there must be something remarkably different in the wild oats sown by either prince. As to the actual difference of those years of reckless youth, no comparison will serve except the reading, and the *feeling* that in the one case the atmosphere is wholesome, in the other, poisonous. Richard II. is like a noble tree round which the choking ivy is allowed to twine or, to use Shakespeare's metaphor, a plant devoured by the "caterpillars of the commonwealth." His flatterers creep too close to Richard's heart; he does not understand how to maintain that little interval which makes the vital difference, that difference which is so easily neglected. Henry, though to all seeming on the closest terms of intimacy with knaves as rascally, has all the while a soul beyond and out of reach of all such things, has

his eyes fixed upon the future that awaits, has self-control enough to be able to renounce at any moment the pleasures of youth and to say to Falstaff, "I know thee not, old man." Richard, like Henry, might have "banished his misleaders." He chose however to forsake the better path; he not only did not banish them, he showered his favours upon them. The contrast becomes more striking when we compare Richard's first words with the sentiments expressed by the new-crowned Henry:—

"*King Richard*: Then call them to our presence: face to face
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser, and the accused, freely speak:—
High stomach'd are they both, and full of ire
In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire. . . .
Now by my sceptre's awe I make my vow,
[His] neighbour nearness to our sacred blood
Should nothing privilege him, nor partialize
The unstooping firmness of my upright soul:
He is our subject, Mowbray, so art thou;
Free speech, and fearless, I to thee allow."

"*King Henry*: My learned lord, we pray you to proceed;
And justly and religiously unfold,
Why the law salique . . .
Or should or should not, bar us in our claim.
And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,
That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,
Or nicely charge your understanding soul
With opening titles miscreate, whose right
Suits not in native colours with the truth;
For God doth know, how many, now in health,
Shall drop their blood in approbation
Of what your reverence shall incite us to:
Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,
How you awake our sleeping sword of war:
We charge you in the name of God, take heed . . .
Under this conjuration, speak, my lord:
For we will hear, note and believe in heart,
That what you speak is in your conscience washed
As pure as sin with baptism."

Surely the difference in the tone of the two speeches justifies every word spoken by the wondering prelates in the opening scene of *Henry V.*, especially the beautiful compliment which hits the truth so nicely—

"The prince obscur'd his contemplation
Under the veil of wildness; which, no doubt,
Grew like the summer grass, fastest by night,
Unseen, yet crescive, in his faculty."

Compare again the difference in the tone of—

"*King Richard*: And for our eyes do hate the dire aspect
Of civil wounds plough'd up with neighbours' swords:
And for we think the eagle-winged pride
Of sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts
With rival-hating envy, set on you
To wake our peace, which in our country's cradle,
Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep" . . .

"*King Henry*: For never two such kingdoms did contend
Without much fall of blood; whose guiltless drops
Are every one a woe, a sore complaint,
'Gainst him whose wrongs give edge unto the swords
That make such waste in brief mortality."

And putting side by side the homage of their subjects:—

"*Bolin.*: Your will be done: This must my comfort be,
That sun, that warms you here, shall shine on me;
And those his golden beams, to you here lent,
Shall point on me, and gild my banishment."

"*Grey*: Never did faithful subject more rejoice
At the discovery of most dangerous treason,
Than I do at this hour o'er myself,
Prevented from a damned enterprise:
My fault, but not my body, pardon, sovereign."

compare the royal answers:—

"*King Richard*: Swear by the duty that you owe to heaven,
(Our part therein we banish with yourselves,)
To keep the oath that we administer;" . . .

"*King Henry*: God quit you in his mercy! Hear your sentence . . .
We doubt not of a fair and lucky war;
Since God so graciously hath brought to light
This dangerous treason, lurking in our way
To hinder our beginnings;" . . .

The conception of the relative importance of earthly king and heavenly is not quite similar in these two cases.

The character of Richard II. is wrought almost as exquisitely as is Cleopatra's. As if to emphasise the contemptible weakness of this sentimental diadem-weaver, Shakespeare endows him with all the fleeting beauties of the changing clouds. The light varies continually and the whole aspect of his mind is turned awry even by the slightest influence. More despicable than Marlowe's infatuated king, if only for his hankering after the vain pomp of state:—

"Ask him his name; and orderly proceed
To swear him in the justice of his cause.
. . . . And formally according to our law
Depose him in the justice of his cause. . . ."

how mean and base a character is revealed by his conduct by Gaunt's deathbed. And how perfectly has Shakespeare developed the idea of "a will that mutinies with wit's regard" in that second scene of Act iii., which is quite a parallel to the scene in *Othello* that ranks amongst Shakespeare's finest scenes. It is impossible to quote from a scene which must be read in its entirety to be appreciated. One might as well attempt to pluck down from the clouds some sunset hue. Let one quotation pass: towards the end, Richard says:—

"Alack, why am I sent for to a King,
Before I have shook off the regal thoughts
Wherewith I reign'd?"

Regal thoughts—there is the secret. Thoughts, indeed, as if that were an instrument of rule. Of Henry, on the other hand, it is said:—

"England ne'er had a king until his time.
Virtue he had, deserving to command . . .
. . . his deeds exceed all speech." . . .

Deeds, will, action: that was the inspiring *credo* of that age. It found expression in Montaigne's Essays, published during Shakespeare's life-time. "Le fond de la morale de Montaigne c'est se connaître pour se posséder. La science de l'homme pour acheminer à la science du moi; la science du moi pour arriver à la puissance sur soi-même; comme aboutissement, et comme récompense aussi, la pleine maîtrise de soi: voilà toute la philosophie morale de Montaigne."*

And thus we have, as it were, the whole teaching of Shakespeare so far as it concerns the practical side of our earthly life; we find that he is never weary of repeating and insisting on the self-evident fact that there is "but one way of obtaining fruit—namely, to plant fruit trees." Let us learn to appreciate in each play the true cause of failure or the secret of success; let us reflect on the startling strength of fearless sin, the weakness of the moral coward—weakness from an earthly point of view, and the pity of the sentimental profligate; let us convince ourselves of the inevitable ruin that dogs the steps of all who err on those forbidden paths, and we shall possess sterling matter wherewith to brace the framework of character. Then let us watch minutely how

* Emile Faguet. *Etudes littéraires* (16^e siècle), 12th ed., page 400.

earnestness of purpose and steadfastness and thought may school a man and fit him for being on even terms with life and with the world. Let us curiously sift out the grain of difference that makes a Hotspur less than a Prince Hal and the vague element in a King Richard II. that calls the tear of pity no Henry V. could ever claim. And lastly let us stand with Henry V. on the summit of worldly success and find that there are undreamt heights towering far above the sunny hill top which from below appeared to be the highest point; and far beneath, unfathomable depths; that there upon a storm-swept down stands Lear; there, wrapped in darkness, weeps Othello; farther away in a dim twilight, Hamlet; whilst from a distant seashore comes the curse of Timon; or there upon the dazzling sheen of an unending river floats a royal barge, bearing a Queen to meet the lordly Antony, or on the blasted moor the witches and Macbeth.